

County of Los Angeles Public Library  
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**Library**

MARGARET DONNELLAN TODD  
COUNTY LIBRARIAN

August 31, 2006

TO: Mayor Michael D. Antonovich  
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Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke  
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky  
Supervisor Don Knabe

FROM: Margaret Donnellan Todd  
County Librarian

*M. S. Todd*

SUBJECT: **REPORT ON SAFETY IN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

On August 15, 2006, the Board of Supervisors requested a report on safety in County public libraries. The following is an assessment of security issues.

Ensuring the safety of library users and library staff is a priority for the Department. In general, the County's public libraries are safe places for our residents. With 88 service points and annual hours of 192,140, there are relatively few serious incidents. The volume and type are typical for large urban libraries.

The Library Department is proactive in its approach to security. We recognize that County libraries are public buildings. Anyone has the right to use the facility as long as they do not engage in criminal activity or disturb another's use of the library. For that reason, our security efforts focus on awareness, prevention, and the continual analysis of all reported incidents.

In the vast majority of instances, the community library staff respond very well to emergencies in their buildings. The Department believes that constant repetition of training is essential to ensure that individuals have the confidence to handle situations that arise. Community Library Managers receive training three times per year on security and disaster preparedness. This training focuses on a wide range of issues from child predators to working with local law enforcement to dealing with the mentally ill and homeless. Community Library Managers are responsible to ensure that every staff person in their library has received appropriate training. The overriding theme of all training is that everyone is responsible for security.

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Community library staff are required to complete security incident reports for any problem from minor concerns to serious incidents. For that reason, there is a high number of incident reports. In addition to reporting all incidents to the County's Office of Security Management, the Library maintains its own incident tracking system. Many incidents consist of lost County ID badges, people arguing over Internet stations or the occasional rodent set loose in a library. But some incidents are serious, such as a gang shooting, robbery or crimes of a sexual nature. Every report is reviewed by library administration; any significant incidents are immediately reviewed by the County Librarian. Administrative staff analyze these reports to determine if Library procedures were followed, if an incident could have been handled more effectively and to determine if any additional assistance or follow up is required. Administrative staff also look for trends to eliminate problems before they escalate. In evaluating incident reports, library administration is especially concerned that community library staff call local law enforcement whenever criminal behavior is involved. If it is found that a staff member failed to follow Library procedures, they receive counseling and/or discipline as well as additional training.

In recent years, the Department has significantly increased its security budget. In 2003/2004, costs were an average of \$74,000. In 2005/2006, those costs increased to \$294,000 and in 2006/2007, costs have increased to \$508,000. It is important to note that these costs do not represent the time of the Assistant Director who oversees security or the Emergency Management Coordinator.

Until 2005, the Library Department depended on local law enforcement to handle security issues at the community libraries. With the long standing exception of the Compton Library, there were no security guards in library buildings. In 2005, however, the Library implemented a pilot project with the Office of Public Safety. The Library contracted for one officer to respond to problems at community libraries. This officer visited libraries to respond to specific problems but also to focus on prevention. This officer advised and trained staff to handle issues that were unique to their library. This pilot proved very successful. For example, one library reported significant problems with adolescents loitering outside the building and exhibiting intimidating behaviors to anyone entering. Staff had been unable to handle the escalating problem. The Office of Public Safety officer was assigned to spend a number of afternoons at the facility. He analyzed the problem and worked with local library staff and the local law enforcement agency to get it resolved. In 2004/2005, the Lancaster Library began to experience significant security problems, many criminal in nature. The Office of Public Safety officer came to the Lancaster site, determined the cause for this sudden increase in problems and recommended the immediate hiring of two security officers for the facility. Since the implementation of that security, problems have been greatly reduced. With the success of the pilot, in 2006/2007, the Department adopted this program and is now contracting for two Office of Public Safety officers.

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In addition to training and increased security staff, building design is a key factor in maintaining security. For that reason, the Department's standard is that each library should have clear sight lines to all areas. These standards are a priority for all new or refurbished buildings. Although older facilities present challenges, the Department is committed to do whatever is possible to improve visibility. For example, where there is no clear line of sight from staff work areas to public restrooms, buzzer systems have been installed. Also, in many facilities, the Department has been able to provide increased separation for adult computers from children's areas.

The Library has particular concerns for the safety of children and the Department has implemented specific policies for their protection. Staff counsel parents about the risk of leaving children unsupervised in any public setting including a library. If children appear to be truant or victims of neglect, staff work with the appropriate agencies to ensure the child's safety.

At closing, library staff will stay with any child who is waiting to be picked up by a parent or caregiver. They will try to make contact with the parents. Failing that, staff will turn the child over to local law enforcement.

Adults may not use children's computers without permission from the librarian. All children's computers have the children's filter which cannot be changed regardless of who is using the computer. Further, while the Library cannot ban adults who appear to have no reason to be in the children's section, library staff is directed to ask those adults if they need assistance. If it appears that the adult has no reason to be in the children's area, staff will request that the individual move to the adult section of the library.

In addition to the measures in place, the Library Department will continue to make security a priority in community libraries. The Department has identified three specific goals for 2006/2007. First, is training for new hires. Although the Department provides thorough training in many areas related to security, that training cannot be readily provided in the first week. For that reason, the Department believes that before an individual begins work in the field, it is essential that each employee receives a basic overview of security policies. At present, this is handled by the Community Library Manager, but the Department is developing a more formal procedure to ensure that everyone understands basic emergency procedures. The second major initiative involves parent education. Youth Services staff have proposed the development of a brochure and other materials that discuss child safety issues in the library and the community. Working with the Office of Public Safety, library staff will develop materials and community programs that can be presented for parents or children. The third initiative is to assess whether additional Office of Public Safety officers for FY2007-2008

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would be cost effective. Any additional increases in security costs will come at the expense of other library services. The final decision will be based on the Library's assessment as well as the Office of Public Safety's capacity to add officers.

Finally, the Department has one concern which must be dealt with by the State. Convicted pedophiles normally have no restrictions on the use of the public library. While each individual's constitutional rights must be respected, the State should determine some legal means by which these individuals would have limited access to the public library.

The Department recognizes that library service in urban settings will always present challenges. On the whole, however, County libraries remain safe places for the public. The Department will continue to work with the Office of Public Safety and local law enforcement agencies to ensure that all possible measures to improve safety are adopted.

MDT:rmo  
U\_Board Motions

c: Board Liaisons  
Chief Administrative Officer  
County Counsel  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors  
Chief, Office of Public Safety